

American, Colonel Rick R. Riera, who is giving up command next week at Fort Benning, GA, the "Home of the Infantry."

Colonel Riera was born on June 4, 1959 in Matanzas, Cuba. At the tender age of nine years old, he and his family fled the Communist government and were granted political asylum in this country. They were flown via a Liberty Flight to Miami, Florida, where Colonel Riera grew up.

Riera was admitted to the United States Military Academy and in 1981 graduated and reported for training at Fort Benning. After his initial training, he was assigned as a Rifle and Scout Platoon Leader on the Demilitarized Zone in Korea.

During his career, Colonel Riera has served in six Infantry Regiments (8th, 15th, 18th, 23rd, 30th, and 75th) and four Infantry Divisions (2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 24th). His service highlights have included assignments as a Ranger Rifle Platoon Leader during the invasion of Grenada, command of two mechanized Infantry companies in Germany during the Cold War, and command of the Infantry's first M2A3 Bradley Battalion during the Division Capstone Exercise.

Staff experience consists of duty as a Battalion S-3, Battalion XO, Brigade S-4, Brigade S-3, and Brigade XO with the Sledgehammer Brigade on Kelley Hill. Colonel Riera also served as the Chief of Crew Training for U.S. Army Europe's New Equipment Training Team during the fielding of Bradleys to the 3rd AD and 2nd ACR. Additionally, he was the first Chief of the Bradley Crew Evaluator Training Team for standardized gunnery at Grafenwoehr.

Joint experience consists of service with J-3 Southern Command in Panama and the Andean Ridge as a counterdrug operations officer at the height of the Drug War against the Medellin and Cali Cartels. Colonel Riera later served as the Army Special Assistant to the Commander in Chief of U.S. Southern Command following its move to Miami, Florida.

In addition to completing Infantry courses here at Fort Benning, he is a graduate of the Regional Studies Course at the J.F.K. Special Warfare Center, the Command and General Staff Course at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, and the Inter-American Defense College. His awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Combat Infantryman's Badge, Expert Infantryman's Badge, and Valorous Unit Award.

Colonel Riera is married to the former Rosario Moreno of San Juan, Puerto Rico. They have two children, Rebeca and Ricky.

Mr. Speaker, Colonel Riera is stepping down as the garrison commander at Fort Benning next week, and I stand here to honor him today for his years of service to this Nation. He escaped tyranny in his native land and, with his family, sought freedom and opportunity in America. He found his freedom and is now dedicating every day of his life to protecting it for his children and for each and every one of us. I thank him for his service, particularly his leadership at Fort Benning, and wish him luck in his future assignment at Fort Sam Houston as Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations, U.S. Army, South.

#### TRIBUTE TO ROBERT F. KERLEY

### HON. ANNA G. ESHOO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Ms. ESHOO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a distinguished American, Robert F. Kerley, who died on July 7, 2006.

Robert Kerley was born and educated in California. He served his country during World War II as a member of General Mark Clark's staff in Italy. After the war he earned his B.S. Degree at the University of California Berkeley, and then began his quarter century career with the University. He was at Berkeley from 1951 until 1964 when he left to become the Vice President for Business Affairs and Treasurer at the University of Kentucky, and went on to serve as Vice President for Administration and Treasurer at Johns Hopkins. He returned to Berkeley in 1970 and served as Vice Chancellor of Administration until his retirement in 1982. Upon his retirement he received the Berkeley Citation, U.C. Berkeley's highest honor. The California Alumni Association awarded him the Alumni Citation for excellence in service and he was named a Berkeley Fellow in 2003, an honor given to a select group for extraordinary service to the University.

Robert Kerley is survived by his beloved wife Betty whom he met at Berkeley and married in 1975 at the Chancellor's residence. He also leaves his children Kathleen James, Maureen Douglas, Barbara Neill, William Kerley and his step-children Katherine Strehl and William Strehl. He also leaves 10 beloved grandchildren . . . Adriana, Allison, Andrew, Brent, Carolyn, Cecily, Christina, Jake, Joseph and Meredith.

Robert Kerley was a member of the Board of Regents of John F. Kennedy University, a member and Chair of the National Association of Colleges and Universities, as well as a member of the Council on Higher Education. He was a founding member and Chair of the governing board of the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, the first group run by and for people with disabilities, and an advisor to Alta Bates Medical Center.

It has been a personal privilege to have known Mr. Kerley's step-daughter for many years. Her integrity and commitment to public service are an eloquent statement about her, as well as her father.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring this good and great American and in extending our deepest sympathy to his family. Robert Kerley contributed greatly to our community and our country, and in doing so, made us a stronger and better nation.

#### IN RECOGNITION OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLAY COUNTY COURTHOUSE

### HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request the House's attention today to pay tribute to the people of Clay County, Alabama, who on August 12, 2006,

will celebrate the centennial anniversary of their county's beautiful and historic Courthouse.

Known across East Alabama as an architectural gem, the Clay County Courthouse was built in 1906 overlooking the square with a Seth Thomas clock. The building has been the site of a number of historic events over the years.

Over the last decade, Clay County citizens have witnessed the ongoing restoration of this beautiful building. In recent years these renovations were completed, helping bring the landmark back to its historic splendor. Today it continues to serve as the county seat in Ashland, Alabama, and features an art gallery, a small museum dedicated to Hugo Black, and a historical display of World War I arms.

The community centennial celebration will occur on Saturday, August 12, where locals will gather for music, food, arts and crafts downtown.

I am delighted to be able to congratulate the people of Clay County at the celebration of this historic milestone, and hope this fine building will continue to serve the people of Alabama well into its next one hundred years. I thank the House for its attention on this important day.

#### RECOGNIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ON ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY

### HON. BETTY MCCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the 75th anniversary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the tens of thousands of men and women serving America's veterans in the VA system. With its establishment as the Veterans Administration on July 21st, 1931, the United States formalized its commitment to providing benefits to America's veterans.

The freedom that we enjoy in the United States exists because of the sacrifices of the brave men and women who have served and protected our nation. Since America's humble beginnings in the Pilgrim colonies, our country has honored the great sacrifice of our veterans by committing to serve them upon their return from duty. Today, the United States provides the most comprehensive system of assistance for veterans of any nation in the world.

Congress must ensure that this tradition of serving veterans remains strong. Many veterans returning from combat in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world have suffered multiple severe injuries, presenting challenges that were unimaginable in past wars. In Minnesota, the Minneapolis VA Medical Center is a leader in the nation in providing the state-of-the-art, life-saving care at its new polytrauma rehabilitation center. These new challenges require that Congress commit to fully funding research and care for these veterans who have given so much in the line of duty.

Nationwide, more than 144,000 returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan have now sought health care with the VA, and it is estimated that one in four Americans are eligible for VA benefits and services. More than